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TAGS: PREL KPAL EG IS SU IR KBIO  
SUBJECT: EGYPT: ABOUL GHEIT ON IRAQ, MEPP WITH A/S BURNS

Classified by Deputy Chief of Mission Gordon Gray for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary

¶1. (C) In a November 13 meeting at the Foreign Ministry, NEA Assistant Secretary Bill Burns and Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit including the Arab League. He cautioned against the negative optic of Americans fighting in Falluja during the conference. He suggested an info

¶2. (C) Aboul Gheit stressed the need for Israel to help facilitate Palestinian elections logistically. Noting his plans to visit Ramallah on N appropriate restraint. On Sudan, Aboul Gheit reiterated his desire to speak at the November 18 UNSC session to be held in Nairobi. He discussed End summary.

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Arafat funeral

¶3. (C) Aboul Gheit recalled the funeral services for Yasser Arafat the previous day, noting the "scary" experience of landing in Ramallah for

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Sharm conference

¶4. (C) The Minister described his intention to make the November 22-23 Sharm El Sheikh conference an opportunity for interaction between delegations. Events, including a dinner and a lunch, would be available to all delegation heads, yet no one would be obligated to join any set event. The design is intended to "enable dialogue" by offering "just the setting."

¶5. (C) As for a basic agenda, he cited a two-hour meeting of Iraq's neighbors plus the UN on November 22, followed by a dinner to which all foreign ministers were welcome. (A/S Burns also suggested a bilateral with Secretary Powell on November 22 if schedules permitted.) Breakfast on November 23 would be at leisure and bilateral meetings were encouraged. A 10:00 a.m. meeting would be an opportunity for delegations to give statements if they chose -- four minutes or so for each delegation who desired. Aboul Gheit said he would clarify at the outset, however, that not all delegations were obligated to speak. "We will not insist on hearing from everyone." After a luncheon on November 23, Aboul Gheit hoped the afternoon could be designed to "encourage interaction" between the various delegations rather than formal group meetings. Aboul Gheit said he would offer a statement to the press and take questions during the afternoon as well.

¶6. (C) Aboul Gheit said the communique "went a little beyond UNSC 1546," which in his view was appropriate since regional powers and regional organizations were meeting to engage more deeply on Iraq. A strong reference to the role of the Arab League, for example, could encourage Secretary General Amre Moussa ("oblige him") to act within an agreed framework.

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Iraq

¶7. (C) Not wanting to "jump to conclusions" about how events in Falluja might turn out, Aboul Gheit said the issue was not "taking over the city" but preventing violence and terror from spreading to other cities. He said "Mosul today reflects Falluja six months ago." A/S Burns noted that Mosul was looking better than a few days prior, and that planning for Falluja involved extensive and immediate economic recovery assistance. The "day after" plans would help bring law and order to Falluja and would make life more hopeful for its residents -- including efforts at job creation. Similar programs in Najaf and Sadr City had emphasized hope and inclusion in rebuilding efforts, said A/S Burns; the upcoming conference in Egypt should stress a similar commitment to international engagement. Aboul Gheit said "your problem is not that the U.S. military fought well, but that they are on TV" too often. Iraqi forces should be in the limelight, he stressed.

¶8. (C) Expressing his hope that the U.S. role would not leave "a bitter impression in the Sunni world," Aboul Gheit cited media scenes of U.S. forces running through mosques while firing their weapons; "these are scenes one must be careful with." A better impression would result if "Mahmoud and Mohammed" were searching the mosque, not "John and Jack."

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Palestine

¶9. (C) A/S Burns noted that Secretary Powell was considering a trip to Jerusalem around the time of the Sharm El Sheikh conference. A key topic would be practical support for Palestinian elections, including pressi Ramallah) on November 24. He lamented that President Bush and British Prime Minister Blair had "put everything on the Palestinians" instead of citing Israel's need to help facilitate meaningful elections. He asked how a people could elect a leader without having freedom of movement within their own cities. Aboul Gheit feared that the GOI might find further pretexts to avoid engagement with the Palestinians, continuing their "no partner" mantra with a new formula. Burns noted that meaningful an opportunity to help stabilize the region if properly handled.

¶10. (C) Aboul Gheit floated the idea of the U.S., Egypt, Israel, and the Palestinians getting together to "launch a process" towardreconciliation. A/S Burns said the idea may be premature, but was nonetheless worth keeping in mind. He said it was important to "make sure there is a practical commitment" on all sides first. Aboul Gheit's goal was to "impli the need for GOI "gestures" like prisoner releases, in addition to logistical support, to make elections (and newly-elected leaders) a success. The lack of such gestures from Israel undercut Abu Mazen's authority as Prime Minister, they opined. Failure to capitalize on current opportunities to reopen negotiations could doom the conflict to continue into the next century, concluded Aboul Gheit. He said Intelligence Chief Omar Soliman would also be gathering Palestinian factions for cease fire talks in Cairo once again, but did not elaborate.

¶11. (C) A/S Burns said the PA needed to demonstrate that it could govern responsibly, and deliver things for Palestinians. He had told Syrian President Asad (in a brief conversation at the Arafat funeral) that it was important for all parties to use their influence to keep things calm. Aboul Gheit said Syria had manifested that desire for some time and was showing restraint. The Syrian Foreign Minister had reaffirmed the same in Cairo the previous week, he asserted.

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Iran

¶12. (C) Asking how the USG might interface with the Iranians in Sharm El Sheikh, Aboul Gheit recommended that Secretary Powell approach the Ir

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Sudan

13. (C) A/S Burns expressed appreciation for Aboul Gheit's interest in addressing a UNSC meeting to be held in Nairobi November 18 and 19. Aboul Gheit said he wanted to deliver a statement early on November 18 (bec

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Bilateral Agenda

14. (C) After a brief listing of pending bilateral issues, Aboul Gheit asked when might be the best time for him to visit the U.S. He agreed that an early February visit, when the Congress was back in session and a

15. (C) Referring to Armed Forces Chief of Staff Weheba's early December visit to Washington, Aboul Gheit said the Lantos amendment (to reassi

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Bio notes

16. (C) About Gheit volunteered during the meeting that he was "a grandfather for the second time." His daughter, Lara, had delivered a daughter personalized, he was ready to accept the invitation; in the interim, however, he was called back to Cairo to begin his tenure as Foreign Minist

17. (C) Citing his 120 days on the job as very busy for him and for his staff (a comment confirmed in the fatigued faces around the room), Abc

18. (U) A/S Burns has cleared this cable.

19. (U) Baghdad minimized considered. Visit Embassy Cairo's Classified Website: <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/cairo> You can also access this State Department's Classified SIPRNET website.

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